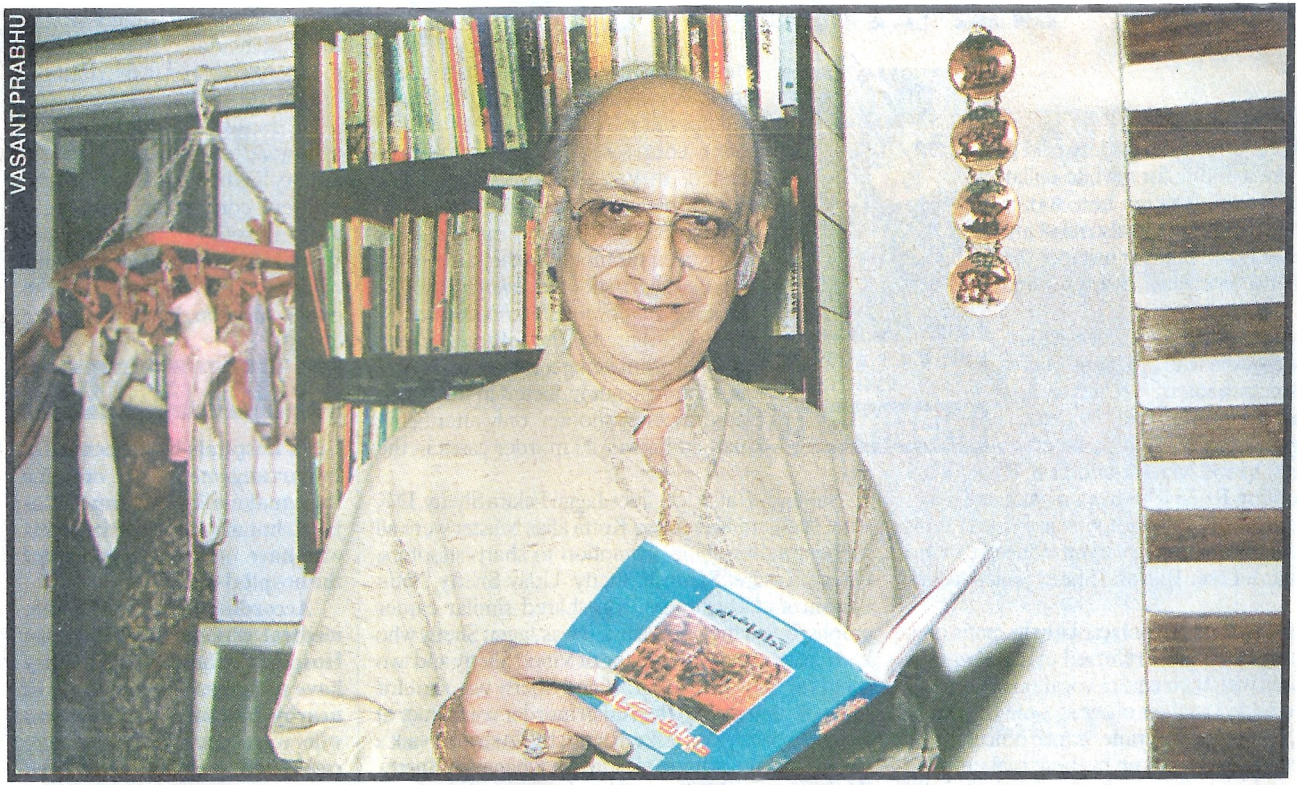
VASANT PRABHU

Main apni hi uljhi hui raahon ka tamasha/ jaate hain jidhar sub/ main udhar kyon nahin jaata (I am a show on my own entangled path, why don't I follow the path others tread) — Nida Fazli

TRUE, Nida Fazli can never be part of the herd. A quintessential rebel, poet and lyricist (in that order), Fazli loves to break norms, waging war against the establishment and ploughing his own furrow. So, while most writers dedicate their autobiographies to their parents, Fazli has dedicated the second volume of his just released autobiography, *Deewaron Ke Bahar*, to his two-year-old daughter Tahreer — the first volume, *Deewaron Ke Beech*, came in 1994. Now he can can take a deep breather.

Sitting against the book-lined wall of his study in the first-floor flat of Amar Apartments, Khar (W), Fazli finds time to talk on life, books, people and his muse, as daughter Tahreer toddles in, making him quip: "Like so many things in my life, she came late. I really tried hard for it."

The release of the second volume of his autobiography leaves poet-lyricist Nida Fazli with breathing space to reveal some to **Mohammed Wajihuddin**

At 55, the poet is father of a two-year-old child, author of 24 books in Urdu, Hindi and Gujarati, recipient of a dozen awards — including the Sahitya Akademi Award (1998) for his poetic collection *Khoya Hua Sa Kuchch* — and script-writer of a serial, *Urdu Hai Jiska Naam* on just launched Urdu Channel, UTN. "It is about 13 classical Urdu poets, from Wali Dakni to Dagh Dehlvi, who made immense contribution to the language and culture. The programme, anchored by actress Zarina Wahab, features guests like Jagjit Singh, Naqsh Lyallpuri, Nina and Rajendra Mehta and Annu Kapoor. It is an attempt to look at the classical Urdu poetry through the eyes of modern Indian writers, poets and performers," says Fazli, chewing *paan* in his inimitable style, as a cultural organisation calls on him to be the chief guest at a function in the evening. "Ok, I will be there at 6.00 pm. Send me a car," Fazli says and hangs up.

The world seems to be under Fazli's feet today. But the journey which began years ago in the backwaters of Gwalior has been marked by umpteen disappointments. "I was an unwanted child, as my mother had tried to abort me when I was in the foetal stage, for she already had three children. And though I lived, I have always carried this complex that I was unwanted," he says, exemplifying his predicament with Shaad Azeemabadi's couplet: *Main khud aaya nahin/ laya gaya hoon".* And if his mother tried to abort him, the world outside didn't treat him well either. In 1994-95, his parents migrated to Pakistan, leaving him in the lurch. "I had just completed my Masters and didn't accompany them because I believed that Jinnah's two-nation theory was the biggest blunder in the modern history of the Indian subcontinent. It harmed millions of Muslims and communalised Urdu, which is actually a symbol of India's composite, secular culture," he says.

Left to fend for himself, Fazli wandered all over, looking for "an anchor, a foothold." He finally reached Mumbai in 1965 and ran away after a few days as "the city terrified me." He came back again with hope in his heart and Rs 21 in his pocket. The poet found a friend, philosopher and guide in Dharamveer Bharti, the great Hindi poet and editor of now-defunct Hindi

magazine Dharmayug. "Bharti gave me some work and asked me to stay back in Mumbai. I am indebted to him." Soon Fazli became a regular contributor to many Urdu and Hindi magazines, wrote poetry, short stories and essays. He started attending mushairas and became popular among the poets of the stage. So what does he feel about mushairas of today? "The standard has fallen over the years. Today, the poets are more performers than men of letters. Many of them, especially women, sing *kalam* written by others," he says.

Not content with what he was doing, Fazli's creative urge and existential needs looked for an outlet, and some good money. This was when film-maker Kamal Amrohi was making *Razia Sultan*, for which he had signed Jaan Nisaar Akhtar (Javed Akhtar's father) as a lyricist. With the film in the making for too long, and Akhtar having passed away after writing a few songs, Amrohi began his search for a new lyricist — someone with command over literature. And though the film-maker knew Fazli but didn't know his whereabouts as "in those days, I didn't have a permanent address and a contact number", Amrohi advertised the need in magazines and on radio. One morning, Fazli found himself in Amrohi's office and signed to write two songs for *Razia Sultan — Tera hijr mera naseeb hai/tera gham hi meri hayaat hai* (your separation is my fate, the sorrow of your departure is my life) and *Haryala banna aaya*". After *Razia Sultan*, it was *Kabhi kisi ko mukammal jahan nahin milta* for *Ahista Ahista, Tum istarah se meri zindagi mein shaamil ho* for *Aap To Aise Na The, Hosh walon ko khabar kya bekhudi kya cheez hai* for *Sarfarosh* and *Kiska chehra* for *Tarkeeb*, to name a few. But the song which made Fazli a household name is *Tum istarah se...*, which is popular even today. Yash Chopra used its opening line as a dialogue in *Kabhi Kabhi*, while Ismail Shroff used it in *Ahista Ahista.*

Talking about his contemporaries, he says: "Sahir, Shakeel, Majrooh, Shailendra, Jaan Nisaar and Raja Mehndi Ali Khan were established names in the world of literature before they joined Bollywood. Today, anyone who can put together a few lines is a poet and a lyricist. Even music directors like Khayyam, Madan Mohan and Naushad knew the language well and understood Urdu poetry. Now you have fly-by-night musicians who set tunes which are nothing but jingles" — a temptation to which Fazli never gave in. On the contrary, a good part of his poetry is inspired by Sufism. "Amir Khusroo and Kabir wrote against the prevalent orthodox society, humanising issues through Sufi poetry," he says, reciting a famous Khusroo couplet, which the poet wrote after death of his spiritual guide Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia: *Gori soyee sej par mukh par daale kes/ chal Khusroo ghar apne saanjh bhaiyee chaudes* (My beloved — Nizamuddin Aulia— has left this world, putting curtain of hair on his face, Khusroo you too leave now that darkness has dawned all around).

Even romanticism dominates Fazli's poetic ouvre. "Yes, I have suffered the pangs of love. I have first-hand experience of *hijr* (separation) and *wisal* (meeting). The persons I have loved might have changed as I have grown, but the feeling remains the same," he says.

Romance, poetry, fiction, film songs, scripts for television shows — Fazli has done it all. And succeeded too. When one leaves him to ready for the evening function, one can only remember Firaq Gorakhpuri's immortal couplet: *Hazar bar zamana idhar se guzra hai/nayee nayee si kuch hai teri rahguzar phir bhi* (The world has travelled this path thousand times, however, yours is always a new and fresh path).